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Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God, our God, we honor Your Name. You have been our help in ages past; you are our hope for the years to come.

Continue to guide our Senators with Your love. Answer them when they cry to You for assistance. Be for them a shade by day and a defense by night. May they exercise sound judgment as they listen closely to the whisper of Your wisdom that will keep them on the path that leads to life. May they trust in Your unfailing love to make the crooked places straight. Lord, give them the wisdom to permit godliness to fill their lives with light and joy.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

VIOLENCE AGAINST ASIAN AMERICANS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we live in partisan times, but there are moments when we can break through the typical divisions and work together on matters of real urgency. The anti-Asian hate crimes legislation this week is such a matter. It is a very straightforward and relatively modest bill to address a pressing and important issue in the country. It would designate a point person at the Justice Department to identify hate crimes towards Asian Americans related to COVID-19—telling Federal law enforcement to make these hate crimes a top priority during the pandemic.

Just as important, it would send a strong message to two groups: to the Asian-American community that the country is paying attention to them and to all of America that this kind of bigotry cannot be tolerated.

I was gratified to hear the Republican leader yesterday say that the Senate Republican conference wanted to move forward on the bill.

This bill was never intended to be some kind of “gotcha” legislation. It is led by Senators HIRONO and DUCKWORTH, two outstanding Asian-American Senators who rightfully want to respond to the rising tide of anti-Asian violence over the past year. When they asked me to move the bill quickly, I thought that was exactly the right thing to do, and here it is on the floor.

The fact that Leader MCCONNELL said yesterday he believes discrimination against Asian Americans is a real problem and wants to move forward and be constructive is a very good thing, and I salute him for it. The entire Senate ought to stand up against the recent surge of anti-Asian violence. We can take the first step later today by voting to proceed to the legislation.

As I said yesterday, my intention is to have a bipartisan amendment process, beginning with the amendment of-

fered by Senators MORAN and BLUMENTHAL—one a Republican and one a Democrat. In consultation with the Republican leader, we can work out an agreement on other germane, non-“gotcha” amendments to the bill if Senators have them. We should be able and should really try in earnest to reach a final resolution and pass the bill through the Senate very, very soon.

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, taking a step back for a moment, this is how the process should work in a closely divided Senate. If the Republican minority allows the Senate to move forward with a bill where we have shared priorities, the Democratic majority will work to set up a process for the Senate to consider germane amendments from both sides.

That is the essence of the organizing resolution we all agreed to earlier this year, and hopefully it is a process we can repeat. In fact, we will test that proposition on the very next piece of legislation. If we are able to finish the anti-Asian hate crimes bill in a timely manner, I will move next to consider a bipartisan water infrastructure bill.

The bill, the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act, was advanced by the Environment and Public Works Committee on a unanimous-unanimous-vote. It will authorize tens of billions of dollars to make sure American families, especially low-income families, have access to safe and clean drinking water. I salute Senator CARPER, the chair of the committee, as well as Senator CAPITO, the ranking Republican on the committee, for coming together on such an important and necessary bill.

So, in addition to further nominations, it is my intention to move the bipartisan water infrastructure bill next week.

As the country turns the corner from COVID-19, our focus will soon shift to

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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how we can cement our economic recovery and create the jobs of the future. President Biden's Build Back Better agenda—a big, bold investment in infrastructure and jobs—is extremely important to that effort. It has wide support among Democrats and wide support among the American people. Many, many Republicans out there in the country support this bill and this concept. The water infrastructure bill is a small but important part of that overall effort.

We hope our Republican colleagues join us in advancing these proposals to repair and reimagine our Nation's infrastructure for a new century. Just like the anti-Asian hate crimes bill, if Republicans let us get on the bill, we can work out a process to have bipartisan debate and amendments, but if the Republican minority prevents the Senate from even debating some of these commonsense proposals, we will have to try to move forward without them.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday President Biden announced that American forces will come home from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. It has been 20 years since that fateful day when the Towers fell and the Pentagon was hit. We in New York live particularly hard with that. I still think of the people I knew who perished: a guy I played basketball with in high school; a businessman who helped me on the way up; a brave firefighter who used to go around the city urging people to donate blood together. But in that time since then, America's Armed Forces, thank God, have become extremely successful in deterring and rooting out terrorist networks around the globe.

President Obama authorized the mission that took out Osama bin Laden, the architect of the 9/11 attacks. Our intelligence agencies have assessed that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups do not pose an immediate threat to strike the United States from Afghanistan because of the brave work of our Armed Forces and intelligence organizations. So after sinking two decades of blood and treasure into wars in the Middle East, it is time to bring our troops home. America does not need to fight forever wars.

I applaud President Biden's decision. Unlike President Trump, President Biden and Secretary Austin have developed a careful and thought-out plan. This isn't President Trump waking up one morning and announcing a random new policy on Twitter while our generals scramble to catch up. This will be a careful and thought-out plan with a real timetable and a firm end date.

Whenever we talk about American troops in the Middle East, one of the concerns is missions creep and the enormous pressure to kick the can down the road and delay final decisions. We should and must stick to the date the President has proposed as the

last day our troops will be there. I have been assured by the White House that the September 11 date will stick and that President Biden will not kick the can down the road.

I know many Senators have questions, so I am happy to let my colleagues know that the administration has agreed to brief all Senators on this important decision. The briefing will take place soon. It will be in the SCIF, and everyone's questions can be asked and answered. The President himself will address the Nation later today and explain the reasons for his decision.

In my view, President Biden's plan to bring American troops home from Afghanistan is a very wise one.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, "Biden takes the easy way out of Afghanistan. The likely result is disaster." This is the morning's lead editorial from one of the Nation's most liberal newspapers.

The administration has decided to abandon U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, which have helped keep radical Islamic terrorism in check, and bizarrely, they decided to do so by September 11. Apparently, we are to help our adversaries ring in the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks by giftwrapping the country and handing it right back to them.

Here is what this administration's own national intelligence threat assessment says will happen:

The Taliban is likely to make gains on the battlefield, and the Afghan government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws support.

This is a quote from this administration.

In 2019, the Democratic leader and the now chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee expressed outrage that the previous administration considered hosting Taliban officials for discussions around the date of September 11.

But now a Democratic administration is going to skip the negotiations and just surrender an entire country back to the Taliban on the very same date? Our President should remember what happened when the Obama administration let political considerations rush a retreat from Iraq—total chaos and bloodshed and ISIS.

Two years ago, I wrote a bipartisan amendment that warned a Republican administration against recklessly withdrawing from Afghanistan or Syria. A supermajority of Senators right here voted for it. A supermajority of Senators voted for it, warning that the terrorist threat had not abated. Where are the Democratic voices today? I hope we will hear from some of them.

Unfortunately, this mistake in Afghanistan is one of several instances of this new administration's surrendering leverage without making America, our allies, or our interests more secure.

In January, President Biden extended the New START agreement with Russia by Executive order for 5 years—no strings attached, no concessions secured, not even a shorter term extension to keep up pressure on Russia to cooperate on a better agreement. Just a gift—a gift.

And then there is Iran. Senior administration officials have gone from denigrating the former administration's "maximum pressure" strategy to simply begging for direct talks with Iran, to proactively offering to remove sanctions that are "inconsistent with the JCPOA." So which sanctions exactly are inconsistent with the JCPOA? Our sanctions on Iran's terrorist organizations or its ballistic missile program?

Most Republicans would be thrilled if President Biden could actually secure a better deal that holds Iran accountable. Giving up the leverage of sanctions before we even get to the table—before we even get to the table—or just return to a bad deal is certainly not a good sign.

It would be hard to support any deal that isn't part of a broader strategy that also confronts the nonnuclear threats Iran poses to America and to the region.

On China, the administration's tough talk has been welcome, but its proposal to cut defense spending after inflation suggests there is less interest in walking the walk. We will not keep pace with China and Russia by cutting defense spending to placate fringe parts of the far left.

The American people need and they deserve a foreign policy that puts our security, our partners, and our interests ahead of the reflexive desire to break with the last 4 years at any cost—at any cost.

If this administration wants a successful legacy on the world stage, if they want accomplishments that will endure, they need to put American strength back at the center and come back to a bipartisan mainstream.

THE FOR THE PEOPLE ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, we know Democrats are desperate to create a national controversy over voting regulations, but the facts and the truth keep getting in the way.

For more than a year, we have seen a coordinated campaign to call any